



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:
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Partisan Divide Over Coverage of “Birther” Allegations
MANY FAULT MEDIA COVERAGE OF HEALTH CARE DEBATE

As the fight in Washington over health care reform continues to dominate public attention and media coverage, most Americans are critical of the way news organizations are explaining key elements of the debate.

News about proposed health care legislation was the most closely followed story of last week, just as it had been the prior week. More than a third (36%) say they followed news about the debate more closely than any other major story. And when people are asked what news story they are talking about with friends, the most frequent response is health care (also 36%), far outpacing mentions of other stories, including the economy.

Public Critical of Media on Health Care				
	Excel- lent	Good	Only fair	Poor
<i>Job news organizations have done explaining...</i>	%	%	%	%
Details of proposals	4	17	32	40
Political debate	6	25	34	28
Effect on people like yourself	7	16	33	37
Figures read across.				

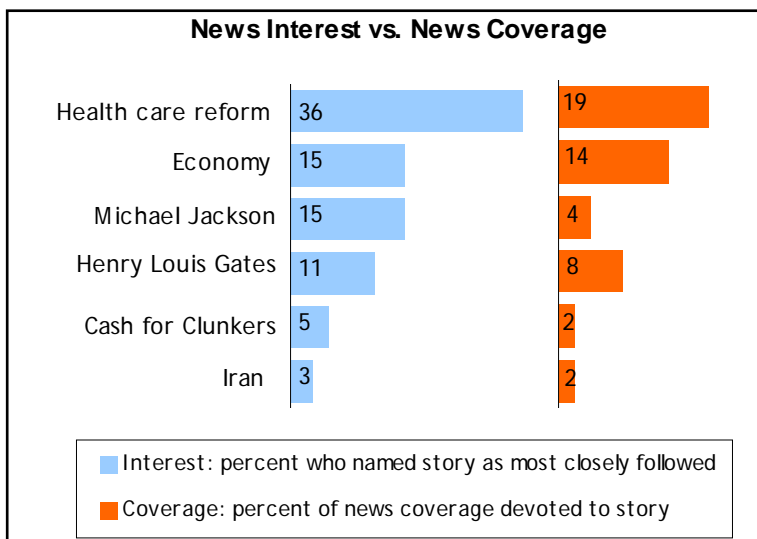
The latest News Interest Index survey, conducted July 31-August 3 among 1,013 adults by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, finds that the public gives news organizations low marks for their coverage of health care. More than seven-in-ten say the media has done either a poor (40%) or only fair (32%) job explaining details of the various proposals. Just 21% offer a positive rating of this coverage: 4% excellent and 17% good.

A similar percentage say new organizations have done either a poor (37%) or only fair (33%) job explaining the effect the “proposals would have on people like yourself.” About a quarter say they have done an excellent (7%) or good (16%) job on this. News organizations receive only slightly better ratings for how they have explained the political debate over health care. Still, 34% rate the job they have done as only fair and 28% say it is poor, while about three-

in-ten say they have done an excellent (6%) or good job (25%) in covering this aspect of the story.

Republicans and independents are somewhat more critical than Democrats of coverage of the health care debate. For example, 46% of Republicans and 43% of independents say news organizations have done a poor job explaining the effects of the proposals on individuals, compared with 24% of Democrats. About half of Republicans (52%) say news organizations have done a poor job explaining details of the proposals, compared with 44% of independents and 27% of Democrats.

For the second week in a row, the media gave more coverage to the health care debate than any other story. An analysis by the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) found that the issue accounted for 19% of the newshole examined – down slightly from 25% the week before – with significant coverage focused on the politics of the debate as Congress approached its August recess without a vote in either chamber.



Plurality Say Too Much Coverage of Obama Citizenship

Most Americans say they have heard at least a little about allegations that President Obama was not actually born in the United States and is therefore not eligible to be president. Eight-in-ten say they have heard either a lot (31%) or a little (49%) about the people making these claims, while 19% say they have heard nothing at all. Nearly nine-in-ten Republicans (89%) say they have heard at least a little about the allegations, compared with 84% of independents and 70% of Democrats.

Of those who have heard at least a little about the issue, 41% say news organizations have given too much attention to claims that Obama was not born in the U.S.; 28% say they have gotten too little attention and 24% say they have gotten the right amount of attention.

A majority of Democrats (58%) who have heard at least a little about the claims that Obama was not born in the United States say they have gotten too much attention from news organizations. Opinion is divided among independents, with 39% saying the allegations have gotten too much attention, 30% too little, and 23% the right amount.

<i>Coverage of debate over Obama citizenship?</i>	<u>Total*</u> %	<u>Rep</u> %	<u>Dem</u> %	<u>Ind.</u> %
Too much	41	26	58	39
Too little	28	39	14	30
Right amount	24	27	23	23
Don't know	7	8	6	8

* Based on those who have heard a lot or a little about people who claim Obama was not born in the U.S. and therefore is not eligible to be president.

Republicans are more inclined to say that the allegations have received too little attention. Nearly four-in-ten Republicans (39%) express this view, while 27% say they have received the right amount of attention and 26% say they have gotten too much attention.

Continued Strong Interest in Health Care

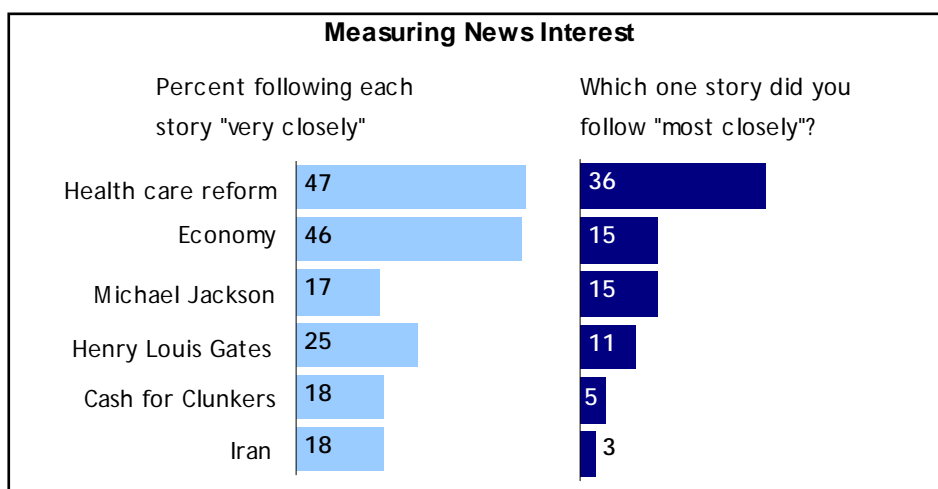
Nearly half of Americans (47%) say they are following the health care debate very closely, which is comparable to the 49% that said the same in September 1993 when then-President Clinton addressed Congress about health care. Two weeks ago, 44% said they were following health care developments very closely.

A similar percentage (46%) say they followed reports about the condition of the U.S. economy very closely last week, virtually the same level of interest as in the previous two weeks. For 15%, this was the story they followed most closely. According to PEJ, news about the economy was the second most covered story, accounting for 14% of the newshole.

A quarter say they very closely followed reports about the controversy surrounding the arrest of African American scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr. at his Cambridge home in mid-July. The story received widespread attention last week when Gates and the white officer who arrested him, Sgt. James Crowley, joined President Obama for a beer and a private discussion at the White House. For 11%, this was the story they followed most closely. Developments in the story accounted for 8% of the newshole.

The proportion saying they very closely followed developments involving the death of pop superstar Michael Jackson stands at 17%; down from the 30% that said they were following the story very closely immediately after Jackson’s sudden death on June 25. Still, developments accounted for 4% of the newshole last week – making PEJ’s top five stories – as authorities continued to investigate the role Jackson’s doctors may have played in his death; 15% say this was the story they followed most closely.

Close to two-in-ten (18%) say they very closely followed reports about the popularity of the government’s “Cash-for-Clunkers” car trade-in program, which appeared to run through most of its original \$1 billion allocation last week; 5% say they followed this story more closely than any other. The story made up 2% of the newshole.



Meanwhile, 18% say they followed reports about the Iranian government’s crackdown on opposition protesters very closely, though just 3% say they followed this story more closely than any other. In mid-June, about three-in-ten said they were following the Iranian crackdown on election protesters very closely.

These findings are based on the most recent installment of the weekly News Interest Index, an ongoing project of the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. The index, building on the Center’s longstanding research into public attentiveness to major news stories, examines news interest as it relates to the news media’s coverage. The weekly survey is conducted in conjunction with The Project for Excellence in Journalism’s News Coverage Index, which monitors the news reported by major newspaper, television, radio and online news outlets on an ongoing basis. In the most recent week, data relating to news coverage were collected from July 27-August 2, 2009 and survey data measuring public interest in the top news stories of the week were collected July 31-August 3, 2009 from a nationally representative sample of 1,013 adults.

About the News Interest Index

The *News Interest Index* is a weekly survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press aimed at gauging the public's interest in and reaction to major news events.

This project has been undertaken in conjunction with the Project for Excellence in Journalism's *News Coverage Index*, an ongoing content analysis of the news. The News Coverage Index catalogues the news from top news organizations across five major sectors of the media: newspapers, network television, cable television, radio and the internet. Each week (from Monday through Sunday) PEJ compiles this data to identify the top stories for the week. The News Interest Index survey collects data from Friday through Monday to gauge public interest in the most covered stories of the week.

Results for the weekly surveys are based on telephone interviews among a nationwide sample of approximately 1,000 adults, 18 years of age or older, conducted under the direction of ORC (Opinion Research Corporation). For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls, and that results based on subgroups will have larger margins of error.

For more information about the Project for Excellence in Journalism's News Coverage Index, go to www.journalism.org.

About the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press is an independent opinion research group that studies attitudes toward the press, politics and public policy issues. We are sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts and are one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

The Center's purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas on the media and public policy through public opinion research. In this role it serves as an important information resource for political leaders, journalists, scholars, and public interest organizations. All of our current survey results are made available free of charge.

All of the Center's research and reports are collaborative products based on the input and analysis of the entire Center staff consisting of:

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PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
July 31-August 3, 2009 NEWS INTEREST INDEX OMNIBUS SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
N=1013

Q.1 What recent news story, if any, have you and your friends been talking about [OPEN END. PROBE ONCE FOR ADDITIONAL MENTIONS. RECORD UP TO THREE. RECORD EACH RESPONSE ON SEPARATE SCREEN. DO NOT READ PRECODE LIST. DO NOT SUGGEST ANSWERS]?

36	Health care reform
24	State of the economy
14	Henry Louis Gates' arrest and Obama's response
11	Michael Jackson's death
10	Cash for Clunkers
6	Iraq war
5	Government/Politics
5	Obama
3	Auto industry
3	Iran
2	Sonia Sotomayor
1	Weather
1	Sarah Palin
1	Stimulus
1	Reports that Manny Ramirez and David Ortiz tested positive for performance enhancing drugs in 2003
1	Bailouts
37	Other (VOL.)
20	No answer/Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

Figures add to more than 100% because of multiple responses.

Q.2 As I read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past week, please tell me if you happened to follow each news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely. First, **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE] [IF NECESSARY “Did you follow [ITEM] very closely, fairly closely, not too closely or not at all closely?”]**

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<u>DK/Refused</u>
a. Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy	46	34	11	8	*
July 24-27, 2009	45	35	12	8	*
July 17-20, 2009	43	35	11	11	1
July 10-13, 2009	37	38	13	11	*
July 2-5, 2009	38	35	15	12	*
June 19-22, 2009	42	33	15	10	*
June 12-15, 2009	41	35	12	12	*
June 5-8, 2009	41	34	11	14	*
May 29-June 1, 2009	43	37	11	8	*
May 21-24, 2009	44	35	13	9	*
May 15-18, 2009	44	35	12	8	*
May 8-11, 2009	42	34	12	12	*
May 1-4, 2009	47	36	11	5	1
April 17-20, 2009	52	30	10	7	1
April 9-13, 2009	48	29	13	10	0
March 27-30, 2009	48	32	10	10	*
March 20-23, 2009	52	34	8	6	*
March 13-16, 2009	48	33	9	10	*
February 27-March 2, 2009	56	30	8	6	*
February 13-16, 2009	55	29	10	6	*
January 30-February 2, 2009	52	31	12	5	*
January 23-26, 2009	57	30	8	5	0
January 16-19, 2009	43	35	13	9	*
January 2-4, 2009	42	36	15	7	*
December 12-15, 2008	51	33	9	7	*
December 5-8, 2008	42	38	13	7	*
November 21-24, 2008	59	24	9	8	*
November 14-17, 2008	56	29	9	6	*
November 7-10, 2008	54	31	8	7	*
October 31-November 3, 2008	63	27	6	4	*
October 24-27, 2008	52	35	7	5	1
October 17-20, 2008	62	29	6	3	*
October 10-13, 2008	65	25	7	3	*
October 3-6, 2008	69	23	5	3	*
September 26-29, 2008	70	22	5	3	*
September 19-22, 2008	56	27	12	5	*
September 5-8, 2008	44	33	16	7	*
August 29-31, 2008	41	34	13	11	1
August 15-18, 2008	39	36	15	10	*
August 8-11, 2008	39	35	16	10	*
August 1-4, 2008	47	34	11	8	0
July 25-28, 2008	46	32	10	12	*
July 18-21, 2008	45	33	13	9	*
July 11-14, 2008	44	33	12	10	1
June 27-30, 2008	49	31	12	7	1
June 13-16, 2008	42	33	14	11	*
May 9-12, 2008	45	31	13	11	*
May 2-5, 2008	43	31	15	10	1
April 18-21, 2008	41	35	13	10	1

Q.2 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
April 4-7, 2008	39	37	12	12	*
March 28-31, 2008	42	36	14	8	*
March 20-24, 2008	45	33	13	9	*
February 29-March 3, 2008	38	35	15	11	1
February 15-18, 2008	37	36	11	16	8
February 1-4, 2008	40	37	14	8	1
January 18-21, 2008	42	31	16	11	*
January 11-14, 2008	36	32	15	16	1
November 2-5, 2007	27	37	16	19	1
October 19-22, 2007	25	34	20	21	*
August 10-13, 2007	28	36	18	18	*
Mid-November, 2006	31	40	17	11	1
December, 2005	35	35	18	11	1
Early November, 2005	35	39	17	9	*
Mid-May, 2005	30	39	19	11	1
January, 2005	35	41	17	7	*
Mid-October, 2004	30	43	16	10	1
Early September, 2004	39	34	15	11	1
Mid-January, 2004	37	41	15	7	*
December, 2003	35	38	14	11	2
November, 2003	40	34	15	10	1
October, 2003	32	39	16	12	1
September, 2003	39	30	18	12	1
March, 2003	40	35	16	8	1
February, 2003	42	33	15	10	*
January, 2003	40	35	13	11	1
December, 2002	38	34	17	10	1
February, 2002	35	40	15	9	1
January, 2002	30	44	16	9	1
December, 2001	37	40	13	8	2
Mid-November, 2001	41	36	15	7	1
June, 2001	24	41	18	16	1
May, 2001	34	36	15	15	0
April, 2001	36	34	16	13	1
February, 2001	30	39	18	12	1
January, 2001	32	38	17	11	2
June, 1995	26	41	22	11	*
March, 1995	27	45	19	9	*
February, 1995	23	41	22	13	1
December, 1994	28	43	20	9	*
October, 1994	27	40	20	12	1
June, 1994	25	42	23	10	*
May, 1994	33	40	16	10	1
January, 1994	34	39	16	10	1
Early January, 1994	36	44	13	7	*
December, 1993	35	41	15	8	1
October, 1993	33	38	20	9	*
September, 1993	37	40	14	8	1
Early September, 1993	39	39	14	9	*
August, 1993	41	36	14	9	*
May, 1993	37	38	18	6	1
February, 1993	49	36	10	5	*
January, 1993	42	39	12	7	*

Q.2 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
September, 1992	43	37	13	6	1
May, 1992	39	39	15	6	1
March, 1992	47	38	11	4	*
February, 1992	47	37	10	6	*
January, 1992	44	40	11	5	*
October, 1991	36	38	16	9	1
b. Debate in Washington over health care reform	47	26	14	13	1
July 24-27, 2009	44	28	15	13	*
July 17-20, 2009	33	31	13	21	2
July 10-13, 2009	24	29	20	27	*
June 26-29, 2009	29	26	20	25	1
June 19-22, 2009	28	28	20	23	*
June 12-15, 2009	29	26	18	26	*
TREND FOR COMPARISON:¹					
May 15-18, 2009: <i>Debate over Obama's health care plans</i>	25	30	20	24	*
March 6-9, 2009: <i>Obama proposing a \$630 billion fund for overhauling health care</i>	41	32	13	14	*
September, 1994: <i>The Clinton administration's health care reform proposals</i>	32	41	18	9	*
June, 1994	34	40	19	7	*
May, 1994	37	37	16	9	1
January, 1994	38	38	15	9	*
Early January, 1994	40	40	14	6	*
December, 1993	45	35	12	7	1
October, 1993	44	32	17	6	1
September, 1993	49	34	11	6	*
August, 1993: <i>Reports about the White House task force on health care reform headed by Hillary Clinton</i>	27	32	25	15	1
June, 1993	28	38	19	15	*
May, 1993	30	30	25	14	1
c. The Iranian government's crackdown on opposition protestors	18	23	26	31	2
July 2-5, 2009: News about controversy surrounding the recent Iranian election	22	31	23	23	*
June 26-29, 2009: The Iranian government's crackdown on election protestors	31	27	18	23	1
June 19-22, 2009: Protests in Iran over disputed elections	28	28	21	22	1
June 12-15, 2009: The presidential election in Iran	18	26	23	34	*

¹ May 15-18, 2009 asked about: "Debate over Barack Obama's health care plans." March 6-9, 2009 asked about: "Barack Obama proposing a \$630 billion fund for overhauling the U.S. health care system." September, 1993 through September, 1994 asked about: "The Clinton Administration's health care reform proposals." May, 1993 through August, 1993 asked about: "Reports about the White House task force on health care reform headed by Hillary Clinton."

Q.2 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<u>DK/Refused</u>
TREND FOR COMPARISON:²					
May 21-24, 2009: <i>Iran testing a missile that could reach Israel</i>	20	29	25	26	*
July 11-14, 2008: <i>The Iranian government firing test missiles capable of striking Israel</i>	25	29	22	23	1
January 11-14, 2008: <i>Encounter between U.S. and Iranian ships</i>	25	26	21	27	1
d. The popularity of the government's "Cash for Clunkers" car trade-in program	18	30	26	23	2
e. Reports about the arrest of Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates and President Obama's response to the incident	25	26	22	25	2
July 24-27, 2009: The arrest of Henry Louis Gates, a black Harvard professor, at his home after a dispute with a police officer	30	31	17	21	1
f. Controversy surrounding Michael Jackson's death	17	18	26	38	1
July 17-20, 2009	17	22	25	34	2
July 10-13, 2009: Michael Jackson's funeral and controversy surrounding his death	25	26	24	24	1
July 2-5, 2009: The death of singer Michael Jackson	25	29	28	18	1
June 26-29, 2009	30	28	23	19	*
TREND FOR COMPARISON—celebrity deaths:					
March 20-23, 2009: <i>Death of actress Natasha Richardson in a skiing accident</i>	18	28	24	30	*
October 3-6, 2008: <i>Death of Paul Newman</i>	19	29	28	23	1
June 13-16, 2008: <i>Death of Meet the Press host Tim Russert</i>	28	23	19	30	*
January 25-28, 2008: <i>Death of actor Heath Ledger</i>	13	29	27	30	1
November 30-December 3, 2007: <i>Death of NFL player Sean Taylor</i>	14	25	22	38	1
March 2-5, 2007: <i>Death of Anna Nicole Smith</i>	14	19	30	36	1
February 23-26, 2007	13	22	33	31	1
February 16-19, 2007	14	25	29	31	1
February 9-12, 2007	11	27	31	30	1
September, 2006: <i>Death of the Crocodile Hunter, Steve Irwin, from a stingray strike</i>	30	36	21	12	1

² May 21-24, 2009 asked about: "Iran testing a missile that could reach Israel." July 11-14, 2008 asked about: "The Iranian government firing test missiles capable of striking Israel." January 11-14, 2008 asked about: "News about a naval encounter between U.S. and Iranian ships." December 7-10, 2007 asked about: "A new intelligence report stating that Iran stopped its nuclear weapons program in 2003." October 26-29, 2007, February 23-26, 2007 and February 2-5, 2007 asked about: "Mounting tensions between the United States and Iran." September 28-October 1, 2007 asked about: "Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's recent trip to New York City where he spoke at Columbia University and the United Nations." June 1-4, 2007 asked about: "Recent talks between the United States and Iran." February 16-19, 2007 asked about: "Reports that Iran may be supplying weapons to insurgents in Iraq." March, 2006 through June, 2006 asked about: "Iran's nuclear research program."

Q.2 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
December, 2001: <i>Death of former Beatle George Harrison</i>	10	23	30	35	2
July, 1999: <i>Death of John F. Kennedy Jr., his wife and sister-in-law in a plane crash near Martha's Vineyard</i>	54	29	13	4	0
March, 1999: <i>Death of former baseball player Joe DiMaggio</i>	18	33	27	21	1
June, 1998: <i>The death of Frank Sinatra</i>	17	31	31	20	1
September, 1997: <i>The death of Princess Diana</i>	54	31	11	4	*
August, 1995: <i>The death of Jerry Garcia</i>	9	19	23	45	4
August, 1995: <i>The death of Mickey Mantle</i>	24	36	21	18	1
May, 1994: <i>The suicide of rock star Kurt Cobain</i>	7	14	25	52	2
TREND FOR COMPARISON—Michael Jackson:					
June, 2005: <i>Michael Jackson trial</i>	13	31	29	26	1
Mid-March, 2005	12	23	32	32	1
February, 2005	8	17	30	44	1
November, 2003: <i>Recent charges of child molestation against Michael Jackson</i>	29	27	22	20	2
January, 1994: <i>Michael Jackson's personal problems</i>	19	30	30	20	1
December, 1993	15	25	27	32	1

Q.3 Which ONE of the stories I just mentioned have you followed most closely, or is there another story you've been following MORE closely? **[DO NOT READ LIST. ACCEPT ONLY ONE RESPONSE.]**

- 36 Debate in Washington over health care reform
- 15 Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy
- 15 Controversy surrounding Michael Jackson's death
- 11 Reports about the arrest of Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates and President Obama's response to the incident
- 5 The popularity of the government's "Cash for Clunkers" car trade-in program
- 3 The Iranian government's crackdown on opposition protestors
- 6 Some other story (VOL.)
- 9 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

Q.4 Thinking about health care, how good a job have news organizations done explaining **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]**

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>DK/Ref</u>
a. The details of health care proposals	4	17	32	40	7
b. The political debate over health care	6	25	34	28	7
c. The effect health care proposals would have on people like yourself	7	16	33	37	8

Q.5 How much have you heard about some people who claim that Barack Obama was not born in the U.S. and therefore not eligible to be president?

31	A lot
49	A little
19	Nothing at all
1	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

ASK IF Q.5=1,2 [N=842]:

Q.6 Do you think news organizations have given too much, too little, or the right amount of attention to the people who claim that Barack Obama was not born in the U.S.?

41	Too much
28	Too little
24	Right amount
7	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)